



Mythology in Modern Literature: An Exploration of Myths and Legends in Sylvia Plath's Poetry

Kamrul Hasan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dhaka City College, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Received: 03 Jul 2023; Received in revised form: 08 Aug 2023; Accepted: 19 Aug 2023; Available online: 31 Aug 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Mythology has become an intrinsic part of literature for the symbolic, structural and functional values it imparts to a text. Although the use of myths and legends in literature has been transformed contextually over the different literary periods, modern writers extensively reappropriated and used them to portray the complexity of the theme and narrative structure of a text. They illustrated the contemporary fragmented reality and individual experience through myths. By incorporating myths in a text, modern writers sometimes created fictionalized and artificial myths of their own. American poet Sylvia Plath made personalized use of myths and legends in her poetry. The paper shows how she, as a confessional poet, amalgamates her personal anxiety and distress with characters and symbols from diverse mythological sources such as the story of Medusa, Medea, Persephone, Electra etc. Apart from classical myths, she incorporated European folktales, Norse and Arthurian myths. Her extensive use of myths portrays the condition of women and the role of patriarchy from a feminist perspective. It also illustrates her attitude toward her father and mother, her distress, agony and suicidal attempts and sometimes expresses her views on life and the contemporary world. Like many modern poets, she turned away from the traditional and orthodox poetic practice and rechanneled her individual crises into poetry which is full of mythological symbols and images.

Keywords— Mythology, Legend, Confessionalism, Modernism, Individualism, Symbol

I. INTRODUCTION

Mythology has been used in literature as a symbol, an allegory, or sometimes as a theory. It also provides narrative strategies to help the narrative process move forward as myths themselves are expressed in narrative form (Lovely, 2019). Myth in literature has an intrinsic symbolic value. Mythology has been massively used by the authors as a coherent structure of any text. The relationship between mythology and literature is based on similarities and differences. Whereas mythology explains our universe and makes societal connections, literature persuades and informs people, and it is used as an instrument for disseminating mythological ideas. Mythological stories have been used as a structure or form of literature from the time of Homer and later utilized by writers like Virgil, Dante, Milton etc. During the Middle Ages popular medieval romance and plays incorporated

myth by turning it into literature. The Romantic period saw the subjective use of myth in expressing personal feelings. In modern literature, mythology has been used as an allusion and intertextual reference to illustrate the complexity of human existence in the modern world. Famous modern poets like T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats reappropriated myth in this way in their works. They used myth as a narrative structure to create order when writing a novel or a poem. By incorporating myth in literature, they create 'mythopoeia' or 'mythopoesis' which means creating an artificial or fictionalized myth.

Like many other modern poets, Sylvia Plath incorporated classical and European mythology in her poems. She blended myths and legends with her personal feelings. Plath reappropriated the characters and symbols from myths and legends, which is similar to T.S. Eliot's idea of the 'mythical method'. Different myths and tales

have given her poetry a coherent narrative order, also they have been used as metaphoric devices. Her integration of myths and tales haven conveyed to depict her personal agony, suicidal attempt, men-women relationship, criticism of patriarchy, condition of women, relationship with her father and mother, motherhood, her views on life etc. While incorporating the mythical images, Plath used them as symbols to comment on her individual anguish and contemporary events. In this way, she juxtaposed the old myths with the present world.

II. MYTHOLOGY AND MODERN LITERATURE

The word 'myth' has been derived from the Greek word 'mythos' meaning fable, legend or saga. Myths have been orally transmitted from generation to generation "explaining religious origin, natural phenomena or supernatural event" (Lovely, 2019, p. 1152). On the other hand, "Mythology is a collection of myths that concerns cosmogony and cosmology, shared by a particular society at some particular time in human history" (Lovely, 2019, p. 1152). The stories of Adam and Eve, Achilles, Odysseus, Gilgamesh or Shiva represent spiritual insight into different cultures. Myth can be defined as a story and can also be defined "as a belief or credo" (Segal, 2004, p. 4) or a "collective or personal ideological or socially constructed received wisdom" (Tanabe, 2022). According to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, "myth is a form of thought" (Cassirer, 1955, p. 27) and like language it can create our own world. Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* devised the theory of myth criticism based on the anthropological and psychological aspects of myths to show how myths can influence our thinking about literature and culture. Frye said, "Myth means ultimately mythos, a structural organizing principle of literary form" (Frye, 1973, p. 341). According to him, the archetypal nature of the use of Biblical and classical mythology in literature provides a set of structures and imagery that are later reproduced in realistic contexts in Western literature (Workman, 1981). Frye's notion of displacement depicts how the use of myths in literature is displaced from its mythic origins and times in different literary periods. In this respect, Joseph Campbell (2004) in *Pathways to Bliss* describes the four basic functions of mythology in our life:

1. Mystical: It awakens our sense of wonder about the world and connects us with the higher order of the cosmos i.e., God.
2. Cosmological: It provides us with the basic ideas and truths about the nature of the universe in the form of stories and rituals.

3. Sociological: It functions as a basis for social order and morality in a community and validates the community's standards as true and correct.
4. Psychological: It makes an individual synthesize and understand the three functions and form a relationship between his/her and the human being, the collective community, the world, and the universe.

During the ups and downs of civilizations myths have been used as a cultural and ideological weapon. In *The Golden Bough* James Frazer shows how myths are created as a result of cultural needs. Mythological knowledge holds power and this power can be exercised to control certain groups of people for domination. Myths are created in a certain society, at a certain time by certain people. Myths narrate the history, religion and hero of that particular culture. By using the knowledge of myth or creating a myth, a tribe, a city or a nation can justify its unjust occupation of a territory or control over a group of people (Tanabe, 2022).

According to Northrop Frye all genres of literature have been derived from myth (Segal, 2004). Modern writers illustrate the complex realities in their works. In doing so they incorporate allusions and make intertextual references. Myth in this respect acts as a metaphoric device and writers insert them in their respective works to give shape and significance to the contemporary fragmented reality (Mambrol, 2016). Myth in modern literature also shows classical notes, although writers used them from a subjective point of view. Sometimes mythology in literature depicts "significant and sometimes very uncomfortable relationships, some admittedly between man and his environment" (Workman, 1981, p. 36).

In any kind of literary form, a writer deals with a particular experience and in this way, a writer becomes a revealer or reporter of any experience (Weathers, 1973). When a writer writes about individuals, societies, the human psyche and communal experience, he may turn to mythology to dramatize those experiences. The spiritual dimension of the 'Grail legend' in Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* inspired T.S. Eliot to use it in *The Waste Land* (Segal, 2004). He used the Fisher King myth from James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* to emphasize the experience of loss of fertility and death (Mambrol, 2016) and Miss Weston's book helped him "with both a central myth and a basic system of metaphor" (Williamson, 1968, p. 119). Eliot outlined the structure and title of the poem based on the Grail legend. He also incorporated the fertility ritual into Grail legend as well as the mythical figure of Tiresias. Eliot used myth as an objective correlative in his poetry to materialize his individual

purposes. According to F.O. Matthiessen (1963), Eliot found a “recurring pattern in various myths, the basic resemblance, for example, between the vegetation myths of the rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the Christian story of the Resurrection, and the Grail legend of purification” (36). Whereas John Milton used the Samson story to express his emotion, Eliot used ancient myths and legends to portray the decay and complications of modern civilization.

About the use of myth in modern literature, T.S. Eliot (2014) formulated his idea of the ‘mythical method’ in his essay ‘Ulysses, Order and Myth’ and showed how the past is related to the present. The method means using myth and narrative to create order when writing a novel or a poem and it shows that instead of the narrative method, Joyce used the mythical method as a structure for his novel. i.e. the mythical and metaphoric journey of Odysseus in *Ulysses*. Eliot also attributed the method to W.B. Yeats’ poem. Yeats constructed a systematic mythological milieu based on Irish mythology and historical, astrological and occult material (Mambrol, 2016). Both William Blake and W. B. Yeats used it in a self-conscious and individualistic way (Reeves, 1997). About the power of myth, Eliot explains that the problems of the present day can be solved if we take profit from the wisdom and experience of the past. That’s why Eliot sought a solution to the modern-day wasteland in myths and legends, Joyce appropriated the story of *The Odyssey* for describing the wanderings of Leopold Bloom in Dublin and Yeats upholds the problems of nineteenth-century Ireland through Celtic mythology. In this way, James Joyce outlined his idea of ‘monomyth’ or a kind of bildungsroman that concentrates on the life cycle of a hero.

In Western literature, Greek and Roman mythology have been used to represent archetypical experiences for a very long time. In this case, a writer “may indeed ‘displace’ certain aspects of the mythology—alter, change, or modify them so that he can say what he truly wants to say” (Weathers, 1973, p. 202). In this way, a writer enjoys the power to deconstruct the accepted form of mythology to convey a motif. For example, in actual mythology birth and life are normally represented through springtime but T.S. Eliot called April the cruellest month. John Milton also subverted the position of Satan in the biblical myth of *Paradise Lost*. Under the guise of an innocent mythical story W.B. Yeats’ ‘Leda and the Swan’ shows Britain’s domination over Ireland. In this way, the incorporation of myth in literature gives a “unique and particular experience” or a “version of archetypical experience” (Weathers, 1973, p. 202). But whatever way a writer uses myth, its interpretation depends on the author’s

subjective position, his/her perspective, preferences and skills.

Lilian Feder (1972, as cited in Weathers 1973) in *Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry* showed how major poets like Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Auden used ancient myth and thus gave birth to something new. Those poets incorporated myth in their poetry in three ways: (1) They created new stories by responding to old myths through the mythic process, (2) they included myths and thus made them literary material in their writing and (3) they used mythology as textbook and adapted the mythological narrative process in their writing. Modern poets followed the legacy of Frazer, Freud and Jung to dramatize the universal situation. In doing so they portrayed their psychological universe. Sometimes myths have been used in modern literature to discuss and compare past historical events.

Myth offers a novelist a shorthand system of symbolic comment on modern events (White, 1971). According to White (1971), novelists can prefigure myth in their works in four ways: (1) by re-narrating a classical myth, (2) by juxtaposing the old myth with the contemporary world, (3) by referring to mythologies in the novel set in the modern world and (4) by making mythological motive part of the narrative. In this respect, White also emphasized the readers’ subjectivity and their way of thinking in interpreting myth in literature. Patricia Merivale’s study of D.H. Lawrence also illustrates how the Pan myth becomes a viable element in his novels. Lawrence synthesized the goat and God to portray the sinisterly sexual but divine in human beings (Merivale, 1969). Both Feder and White showed how modern writers sometimes create myths on their own. They indirectly referred to the term ‘mythopoeia’ or ‘mythopoesis’ meaning the creation of artificial or fictionalized myth. This myth-making process has been adopted in both literature and film. Here a writer enjoys his liberty in subverting and re-creating popular myths.

III. PLATH’S REAPPROPRIATION OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

In the foreword to Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* Robert Lowell considered Plath as “one of those super-real, hypnotic great classical heroines” (1965, p. vii). Sylvia Plath in her poetry reveals a coherent persona of her own self which shows the dynamic energy of her poetry as well as her dynamic creative power. “While her poems often begin in autobiography, their success depends on Plath’s imaginative transformations of experience into myth” (Baym, 1998, p. 2743).

Like the modernist authors, Plath used myths for allusion, intertextuality and making their works a reservoir of complex phenomena. "The most important Greek myths that appear in her work are the legends of Electra, Medusa and Colossus, which she took as the title for her first collection of poems" (Warren, 2005, p. 78). It is important to note that Plath's use of myths and folktales is very subjective and intentional. Regarding the use of myths and legends in Plath's poetry Bassnett says, "The poems are chapters in a mythology . . . the world of her poetry is one of emblematic visionary events, mathematical symmetries, clairvoyance and metamorphoses" (2005). Plath's use of myths and legends, combined with her personal feelings, creates different visual images and impressions than other modern poetry. Even in her journals, she mentions some folktales.

Sylvia Plath belongs to the group of poets known as the confessional poets. Confessional poetry "reveals the poet's personal problems with unusual frankness" (Baldick, 2001, p. 48). The amalgamation of personal anxiety with social and cultural context is one of the major features of this type of poetry. To do so, poets like Robert Lowell, Ann Sexton and Sylvia Plath intentionally and unintentionally portray an "unmentionable kind of private distress" (Baldick, 2001, p. 49). In Plath's poetry, one can see her deliberate attempt to adopt different types of personae. For this, she constantly used mythological characters and symbols to express her forceful and urgent thoughts.

Her poems "were inspired by [her] own experiences" (Warren, 2005, p. 7) which are all about individual crises, victimhood, domestic milieu, feminine experience, and lack of communication between men and women (Warren, 2005). Moreover, she transformed her practical experiences imaginatively for artistic purposes. Perhaps that is the obvious reason why she blends myths and legends with personal experience. Her objective behind the transformation of mythic events and characters complies with the way Eliot, Yeats and other modern poets used mythical allusions in their poetry.

Like many of her contemporary poets, Sylvia Plath followed the poetic tradition of the 1950s and 60s. It was a period of intense poetic flourishing. Many poets were turning away from the traditional and orthodox poetic practice but more specifically, through their poetry, they were escaping from the social horrors and rechanneled them into "individual psychology, classical mythology and mysticism" (Warren, 2001, p. 108). Robert Lowell and Ann Sexton also belong to this group. They reflected themselves in their poetry by incorporating allusions and metaphors from multiple sources.

The influence of modernist literary tradition was apparent in Sylvia Plath. She was admirably affected by the vision and mission of modern poets such as T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas. Modernist poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats rejected the orthodox forms and techniques and made poetry more complex and obscure with the extensive use of myth and other intertextual allusions (Warren, 2001). Although their poetry was not confessional like the poetry of some American poets of the 1950s, they reflected the angst and ennui of the modern period. On the contrary, Plath's poetry evokes a sense of personal anguish, emotions and experiences that discomfort us. Her poetry is a reservoir of "unfeminine emotions from a female perspective" (Warren, 2001, p. 7). Plath incorporated the myths and tales in her poems, but entirely personal way.

Her use of myths and legends has a relation with the formative influence she had from other confessional poets of the era. Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell and Ann Sexton's influence was on her, especially since she was directly motivated by the last two poets to insert mental crises and traumas in her poems. Some poets from the confessional school of poetry suffered from mental breakdown and committed suicide i.e., Ann Sexton, Sylvia Plath and John Berryman. They used poetry as a catharsis and made personal use of themes, symbols and metaphors to purge inner anguish. It may justify the way Plath incorporates myth and folktales to give voice to her suppressed personal pains. She adopted different voices and personae from diverse mythological sources. In using myths and tales, Sylvia Plath was especially influenced by another American poet Marianna Moore and her reinterpretation of fairy tales in her poems (Warren, 2001). Plath experimented with the use of folktales in her early poetry but later incorporated classical myths and allusions in a complex way. In this respect, she followed the path of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats who incorporated myths and legends with his private references in his poetry. As Warren (2001) says, "W.B. Yeats saw myth and symbolism as means by which to give shape to and make sense of his vision of the world" (p. 114).

IV. HER PERSONALIZED REPRESENTATIONS OF MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Sylvia Plath was very critical regarding the position of women in society. In many of her poems, she used myths from diverse sources to portray the inherent female power, a resistance to the prevailing patriarchal system. In the poem 'Faun' she illustrated the men-women relationship from a feminist perspective. Faun is a kind of rural deity in

mythology which is like a man with goat's legs and horns famous for their promiscuity and sexuality. Through the creature faun, she represented how men like to see themselves in a godlike position. From a personal point of view, she presents her feelings towards her husband Ted Hughes.

In 'Virgin in a Tree' Plath portrays the hypocrisy of modern times regarding female sexuality. She illustrated her point by showing examples of virgin maidens such as Daphne and Syrinx in Greek mythology who were pursued by Apollo or Pan and turned into trees. With this, Plath shows the pain of the virgin that can make them numb like a tree. The poem shows women as the victims from the point of view of the popular notion of chastity. Plath also mentioned Helen of Troy in this regard. In 'Goatsucker' she connects the condition of women with the image of the goatsucker, a nocturnal bird with something dark and sinister like a vampire to illustrate the point that women require proper connection to the natural world in their life.

'Lady Lazarus', another widely read poem, shows Plath's personal agony, her suicidal attempts and the discovery of her new self like the biblical Lazarus. Lazarus was brought back to life by Jesus Christ after three days of his death. From the feminist perspective, the poem symbolizes the struggle to defy patriarchal oppression. The poem ends with the image of the myth of the bird Phoenix:

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air. (1989, p. 247)

Plath's incorporation of biblical stories is also evident in 'Mary's Song' where the destruction of the Holocaust has been illustrated with reference to the Virgin Mary.

In many of her poems, Plath reappropriated the myth for personal use and one such example is 'Two Sisters of Persephone' Persephone, the queen of the underworld, is also a vegetation goddess responsible for the change of season. She symbolizes the duality between the death of nature (Autumn and Winter) and the rebirth of nature (Spring and Summer). With the metaphorical reference to the duality of the two sisters in the poem, Plath indicates the shifting attitude toward women in society or the two sides of feminine identity.

'Winter Trees' describes the trees on a winter morning and compares them with the tribulations women undergo in society. She personified the winter trees with Leda in Greek myth who was raped by Zeus in the form of a swan. The poet's desire for freedom is evident in 'Ariel' which alludes to the legendary story of Lady Godiva who rode upon a horse around the whole town naked as a protest for excessive taxation on the people. The speaker

here wants to be a folk hero like Godiva, a symbol of freedom from patriarchy. Even in 'Gulliver' Plath retold the story of Jonathan Swift's popular novel to show the limitations and restrictions in the life of women. At the end of the poem, she added the popular European folktale 'seven league boots' that gives a person unbelievable speed of travelling seven leagues with one step. It actually refers to the poet's calls for the utilization of individual potential without any obstacles, especially for women.

Many of Plath's poems deal with the complex relationship between father and daughter. In personal life Plath was shocked after the death of her father and its effect can be seen in her poems especially in 'Electra on Azalea Path' Plath shows the effect of a father's death on a daughter. By referring to the daughter of Agamemnon in Greek mythology the poet here indirectly refers to the popular Freudian theory of Electra complex. This is also a confessional poem with many personal symbols and images. 'The Colossus' also shows the poet's grief over the death of her father represented through the broken statute of the Greek Sun-God Helios which is also known as the Colossus of Rhodes. Her sorrow has been expressed in this way:

I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed. (Plath, 1989, p. 129)

In her personal life, Plath's father had a large impact on her like the giant statue of Colossus. The poem also metaphorically illustrates the condition of women and the unlimited responsibility they have to perform. The intensity of the father-daughter relationship is found in 'Maenad' where the poet considers herself as Maenad, the female follower of Bacchus in classical mythology. The poet laments for her dead father and represents him like the mythical sea god Neptune in 'Full Fathom Five' like this:

Miles long
Extend the radial sheaves
Of your spread hair, (Plath, 1989, p. 92)

In 'Daddy' Plath again shows the complex relationship with her father making constant reference to the Holocaust. The father figure is represented as a fascist and a Nazi from whom the poet struggles to get free. The poet also presented the image of her husband as a vampiric figure and found similarity with her father. The underlying fact is that the speaker of the poem has an internal Electra complex but at the same time she wants to get rid of the oppressive influence of men.

Motherhood, mother-child and mother-daughter relationships are the subject matter of many of her poems.

In these poems, she uses masculine and feminine mythological images. In 'You're' Plath celebrates motherhood and compares the position of her baby in the womb with Atlas, the giant in Greek mythology who carried the world on his shoulder:

Bent-backed Atlas, our travel prawn. (1989, p. 141)

The image of Atlas is also evident in the poem 'By Candlelight' where a mother compares the strength of her unborn baby with Atlas:

He is yours, the little brassy Atlas- (1989, p. 137)

'The Disquieting Muses' presents the muses, the inspirational goddesses in Greek mythology, as a dark force. The muses in the poem represent Plath's mother and the uncommunicative relationship between mother and daughter. In the poem 'Magi' Plath deals with her relationship with her daughter in a philosophical way. Although the title refers to the Biblical kings who visited the baby Jesus, Plath in this poem tries to find a divine solution to her personal problems. 'Heavy Women' represents the image of pregnant women as 'irrefutable, beautifully smug' comparing them with the goddess Venus. The poem also conveys the idea that the mother is rewarding as well as full of physical and mental sacrifice and suffering.

Plath was well aware of the contemporary world around her and saw the current events with the eyes of a critic. In some of her poems, she also expresses philosophic views on the question of existence. The poem 'Face Lift' has an allusion to the Roman god Jove whom she criticizes referring to the cosmetic surgery of women. On the other hand, in 'The Munich Mannequins' she compares the trees to Hydras, the many-headed monster in classical mythology:

Where the yew trees blow like hydras,

The tree of life and the tree of life (1989, p. 262)

The poem 'The Death of Myth-Making' refers to the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien which are full of myth and legends. Plath here indicates the difference between the real world and the effects of the mythical world books create in our mind.

The merging of the spiritual and material world has been shown in 'On the Plethora of Dryads' where the poet has the desire to see beyond the material world but is overwhelmed with the spiritual beauty of the tree and dryad. A dryad is a tree nymph or tree spirit in Greek mythology. The poem is more like a poetic inspiration the poet collects from the world around her. Referring to the story of King Midas and his golden touch, the poem 'In Midas' Country' shows that life is not always perfect like

gold. Yearning for golden perfection in life is a desire many want to fulfil.

In another of her famous poems, 'Crossing the Water', the theme of transition has been illustrated with the symbol of a boat and lake. The movements of the two travellers are like "travelling across river such as Styx (Warren, 2001, p. 41) in Greek mythology. Later they became "blinded", 'astounded' and struck dumb by the 'expressionless sirens'" (Warren, 2005, p. 41) like the Sirens, bird-like women in Homer's *Odyssey* who can lure sailors and cause death with their song. Moreover, the image of the 'snag' lifting its 'valedictory, pale hand' refers to the hand from the lake in Arthurian legend. The poem 'Lyonnesse' also refers to the imagined land and the Arthurian legend and of the lost glory.

Sylvia Plath suffered from untenable pressures in her personal life which caused depression and that led her to take her own life (Bassnett, 2005). Poetry was like a personal catharsis for her where she poured out all her anguished suppressed pains. In this respect, she fulfilled the psychological role of incorporating myths in her works. By using the images of myths and legends she formed a relationship between her psyche and the outer world. She used powerful female characters from myths and legends like Medusa, Medea etc. One such poem is 'Rival' where Plath shows a fully resentful attitude to her rival. She compares her rival to Medusa, a Gorgon monster in Greek myth who has snakes on her head instead of hair and her eyes can turn anything into stone who looks at them. In the poem both Medusa and the rival's manipulative and deceiving quality have been expressed in this way:

"Both of you are great light borrowers.

Her O-mouth grieves at the world; yours is unaffected,

And your first gift is making stone out of everything" (Plath, 1989, p. 166).

Medusa imagery is also apparent in another of her poems 'Medusa' where she compares jellyfish with the snake-covered head of Medusa because of its tentacles:

You steamed to me over the sea,

Fat and red, a placenta

Paralysing the kicking lovers. (Plath, 1989, p. 224)

The poem shows her personal relationship with her mother Aurelia Plath whom she compares with jellyfish and Medusa and becomes very critical regarding the behaviour of her mother to her as she wanted to exert influence on

the daughter's life with over-attention and possessive instinct.

The poem 'Lorelei' is about the German legend of Lorelei, the nymph of the Rhine river whose singing lured the boatmen to their destruction much like the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*. The poem shows Plath's fascination for death as the word Lorelei symbolizes death in the poem. In her personal life death was like an escape for her as she took several attempts at suicide before committing suicide in 1963.

Sometimes she included the image of a mythical hero to portray her personal anguish. 'Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering' the poem named after the famous Greek hero, has several Greek mythological references. In the first stanza, the poet refers to Hercules, another great hero and relative of Perseus. Both had some similar traits- both were demigods and were born with a curse. The poem then refers to the ill-fated Trojan priest Laocoön, devoured with his sons by a sea serpent. The second stanza of the poem refers to how Perseus beheaded Medusa, the serpent-headed monster:

Not nails, and a mirror to keep the snaky head
In safe perspective, could outface the gorgon-
grimace
Of human agony. (Plath, 1989, p. 83)

After chronicling the personal glory of the Greek hero Perseus Plath indirectly refers to the personal agony and her sufferings at the end of the poem.

The impact of human tragedy on people has been effectively shown in 'Aftermath'. Here Plath used the image of Medea in Greek mythology to show how onlookers reflect on someone else's calamity. The legend of Medea is also present in the poem 'Edge' where the poet indicates her impending death, a tragedy like Medea. 'The Eye-Mote' is also about a personal tragedy where the poet considers herself like the tragic hero Oedipus when she was struck by a splinter in the eye which hindered her view of the idyllic landscape and caused depression.

'Getting There' illustrates Plath's spiritual journey for rebirth and ends with the image of the river Lethe of the underworld in Greek myth. It is also known as the river of forgetfulness whose water the souls are made to drink to forget the memory of their past life. Plath here wants a psychic reborn much like those souls. Plath gives a depressive view of the landscape and its effect on the mind in the poem 'Wuthering Heights' by incorporating the imagery of the story of 'Red Riding Hood'. She used the symbol of sheep as a robust life force. The 'grandmotherly disguise' of the sheep indicates the idiom 'wolf in sheep's clothing' as well as the wolf in the folktale.

Apart from these, her interest in Norse Mythology is evident in poems like 'The Hermit at Outermost House'. Here she mentions "The great gods, Stone-Head, Claw-Foot" (1989, p. 118) indicating the Norse god Hrungrir who was made of stone. Also, the poem 'Battle-Scene' refers to the *Odyssey* and the story of Sindbad from the *Arabian Nights*.

V. CONCLUSION

Sylvia Plath used symbols and imagery from mythology and legendary tales as symbols, metaphors and allegories. Unlike the notable modern poets, her appropriation of myth is more personalized and more intimate. Her personal motif and experience are merged with the mythical characters and images. It fulfils the social and psychological functions of literature. On the one hand, she showed the complex realities and her psychological condition and on the other hand, she materialized the individual purposes by portraying her psychological universe. The use of myths and legends has become a vehicle in her poems by which she illustrates her personal depression and anxiety, the condition of women in society, her relationship with her parents and her views on the contemporary world around her. In portraying the mythical characters and elements she adopted different personae like Medusa, Medea, Oedipus, Electra etc. She transformed her practical experiences and her inner self for artistic purposes. Ultimately, her objective behind the use of myths and legends complies with Eliot and Yeats' mythical method.

REFERENCES

- [1] Baldick, C. (2001). *The concise Oxford dictionary of literary terms*. Oxford University Press.
- [2] Bassnett, S. (2005). *Sylvia Plath: An introduction to the poetry*. Palgrave.
- [3] Baym, N. (Ed.) (1998). *The Norton anthology of American literature* (5th ed., Vol. 2). W. W. Norton.
- [4] Campbell, J. (2004). *Pathways to bliss: Mythology and personal transformation*. New World Library.
- [5] Cassirer, E. (1955). *The philosophy of symbolic forms* (Vol. 2). Yale University Press.
- [6] Eliot, T. S. (2014). Ulysses, order, and myth. In A. Cuda & R. Schuchard (Eds.), *The complete prose of T. S. Eliot* (Vol. 2, pp. 476-479). John Hopkins University Press.
- [7] Frye, N. (1973). *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton University Press.
- [8] Lovely. (2019). The relationship between mythology and literature. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education*, 16(4), 1149-1155. <http://ignited.in/I/a/210981>
- [9] Lowell, R. (1965). Foreword. In S. Plath, *Ariel* (pp. vii-ix). Harper & Row.

- [10] Mambrol, N. (2016, March 21). Myth criticism of Northrop Frye. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2016/03/21/myth-criticism-of-northrop-frye/>
- [11] Mambrol, N. (2016, March 24). Modernist use of myth. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://literariness.org/2016/03/24/modernist-use-of-myth/>
- [12] Matthiessen, F.O. (1963). *The achievements of T.S. Eliot*. Galaxy Book.
- [13] Merivale, P. (1969). *Pan the goat-God: His myth in modern times*. Harvard University Press.
- [14] Plath, S. (1989). *Sylvia Plath: Collected poems* (T. Hughes, Ed.). Faber and Faber.
- [15] Reeves, C. E. (1997). Myth theory and criticism. *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. <https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/271/Myth%20Theory%20and%20Criticism.htm>
- [16] Segal, R. A. (2004). *Myth: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- [17] Tanabe R. (2022, November 2). Mythology. *New World Encyclopedia*.
<<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Mythology&oldid=1015646>>.
- [18] Warren, R. (2005). *Sylvia Plath: Selected poems*. York Press.
- [19] Weathers, W. (1973). Mythology in modern literature. *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, 6(2), 201-213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/44233424.pdf>
- [20] White, J. (1971). *Mythology in the modern novels*. Princeton University Press.
- [21] Williamson, G. (1968). *A reader's guide to T. S. Eliot*. Thames and Hudson.
- [22] Workman, M. E. (1981). The role of mythology in modern literature. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 18(1), 35-48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814186>